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THE BAND OF GIDEON

JOSEPH S. COTTER, JR.



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THE BAND OF GIDEON
AND
OTHER LYRICS



The BAND of GIDEON

And Other Lyrics

By JOSEPH S. COTTER, Jr.



THE CORNHILL COMPANY

BOSTON

[1918]

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IN MEMORY
OF
MY SISTER
FLORENCE OLIVIA COTTER



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INTRODUCTION

Nearly twenty years ago there came to my door a Negro of fine standing in the community, with the manuscript of a play which he desired me to read. That manuscript, whatever its faults, had the fundamental quality of sincerity — a quality that is not always present in work that often finds its way to a far wider audience.

The writer of that play was Joseph S. Cotter, and now in this volume, written by Joseph S. Cotter, Jr., his son, there is displayed the talent for verse-writing that I found in the father; a talent which has, however, in this instance, been hampered by sad ill health. For the verses of this volume were nearly all written on a sick bed, by a boy whose twenty-two years have been far from filled with the ineffable boon of strong health.

But to the public the interest these verses will have, apart from their merit and the gallant spirit in which they are written, lies in this: The Negro race, which has always been able to ease its heart with melody and folk-song, is beginning to look upon words also as a medium of giving expression to its deeper and finer emotions. Paul Lawrence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson are perhaps the most distinguished of those who have entered the field of poetry, but perhaps if health is re-

stored to Joseph S. Cotter, Jr., he also may later find himself ranking with these two of his predecessors. At least all sympathizers with the Negro race will hope this may be so, and will give an interested attention to this small but earnest sheaf of songs.

CALE YOUNG RICE.

LOUISVILLE, JUNE, 1918.

THE BAND OF GIDEON
AND
OTHER LYRICS

THE BAND OF GIDEON

The band of Gideon roam the sky,
The howling wind is their war-cry,
The thunder's roll is their trump's peal,
And the lightning's flash their vengeful steel.

Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,
"The sword of the Lord and Gideon."

And men below rear temples high
And mock their God with reasons why,
And live in arrogance, sin and shame,
And rape their souls for the world's good ^{name}.

Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,
"The sword of the Lord and Gideon."

The band of Gideon roam the sky
And view the earth with baleful eye;
In holy wrath they scourge the land
With earth-quake, storm and burning brand.

Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.

And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,
“The sword of the Lord and Gideon.”

The lightnings flash and the thunders roll,
And “Lord have mercy on my soul,”
Cry men as they fall on the stricken sod,
In agony searching for their God.

Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,
“The sword of the Lord and Gideon.”

And men repent and then forget
That heavenly wrath they ever met,
The band of Gideon yet will come
And strike their tongues of blasphemy dumb.

Each black cloud
Is a fiery steed.
And they cry aloud
With each strong deed,
“The sword of the Lord and Gideon.”

THE MULATTO TO HIS CRITICS

Ashamed of my race?
And of what race am I?
I am many in one.
Thru my veins there flows the blood
Of Red Man, Black Man, Briton, Celt and Scot,
In warring clash and tumultuous riot.
I welcome all,
But love the blood of the kindly race
That swarthes my skin, crinkles my hair,
And puts sweet music into my soul.

A PRAYER

As I lie in bed,
Flat on my back;
There passes across my ceiling
An endless panorama of things —
Quick steps of gay-voiced children,
Adolescence in its wondering silences,
Maid and man on moonlit summer's eve,
Women in the holy glow of Motherhood,
Old men gazing silently thru the twilight
Into the beyond.
O God, give me words to make my dream-children
live.

THE DESERTER

I know not why or whence he came
Or how he chanced to go;
I only know he brought me love
And going, left me woe.

I do not ask that he turn back,
Nor seek where he may rove;
For where woe rules can never be
The dwelling place of love.

For love went out the door of hope,
And on and on has fled;
Caring no more to dwell within
The house where faith is dead.

IS THIS THE PRICE OF LOVE?

Never again the sight of her?
Never her winsome smile
Shall light the path of my journeying
O'er many a weary mile?
Never again shall her soft voice come
To cheer me all the while?
O Thou, who hearest from above,
Tell me, is this the price of love?

Never again the touch of her lips?
Never her dark, brown eyes
Shall shine on me with the dancing joy
Of stars in the summer skies?
Never again shall my song be aught
Save minor chords of sighs?
O Thou, who hearest from above,
Tell me, is this the price of love?

EGO

Day passeth day in sunshine or shadow,
Night unto night each cycle is told;
Sun, moon and stars in whirling and glamour,
All unto all the creation unfold.

What of the strivings, what of the gropings,
Out from the darkness into the light?
What of the weepings, what of the grievings
Now from the day to a passionless night?

Stars of the stars, heavens of the heavens,
Rising or falling or pausing a span,
Each to the great "I am" replying,
E'en as the crystal, even as man.

Chant of the worlds from æon to æon,
Song of the soul from dust unto dust,
Dream of the clods that, upward and starward,
Rise to the call of the primal "Thou must."

Space beyond space, eternity's vision,
Chaos to chaos, calm unto calm,
World beneath world, heaven above heaven,
Life but the urge, death but the balm.

DREAMS

There is naught in the pathless reach
Of the pale, blue sky above,
There is naught that the stars tell, each to each,
As over the heavens they rove;
That I have not felt or have not seen
Clad in dull earth or fancy's sheen.

There is naught, in the still, mauve twilight
When the dreams come fitting by,
From lands afar of eternal night,
Or lands of the sunswept sky,
For countless spirits within me dwell
With heaven's effulgence or dark hell.

THEN I WOULD LOVE YOU

Were you to come,
With your clear gray eyes
As calmly placid as, in summer's heat,
At noon-tide lie the sultry skies;
With your dark brown hair
As smoothly quiet as the leaves
When stirs no cooling breath of air;
And, shorn of smile, your full, red lips
Prest firmly close as the chalice bud
Before the nectar-quaffing bee ere sips,
I would not know you,
I would not love you.

But, should you come,
With your love-bright eyes
Dancing gaily as, on summer's eve,
The stars adown the western skies;
With your hair wind-caught
And circled round your shining face
In fashion which no hand ere wrought;
And your full, red lips poised saucily,
As the slender moon mid a hundred stars,
And held aloof in daring taunt to me,
Then I would know you,
Then I would love you.

I'M A-WAITING AND A-WATCHING

I'm a-waiting and a-watching for the day that
has no end,
For the sun that's ever shining, for its rays that
ever blend;
For the light that casts no shadows, for the sky
that's ever fair,
For the rose that's ever blooming as its fragrance
fills the air.

I'm a-waiting and a-watching for the land that
knows no night;
Where the terrors of the darkness are dispelled in
morning's light,
Where the murmurs of the breezes blend them-
selves into a song,
And the silvery carol echoes to the heavens, soft
and long.

I'm a-waiting and a-watching for the song that's
never o'er,
For the joy that's never ending on that light-em-
blazoned shore,
For the peace that shall enfold me with the heavens'
holy breath,
For the glory that shall greet me, for the life
that knows no death.

AND WHAT SHALL YOU SAY?

Brother, come!

And let us go unto our God.

And when we stand before Him

I shall say —

“Lord, I do not hate,

I am hated.

I scourge no one,

I am scourged.

I covet no lands,

My lands are coveted.

I mock no peoples,

My people are mocked.”

And, brother, what shall you say?

IS IT BECAUSE I AM BLACK?

Why do men smile when I speak,
And call my speech
The whimperings of a babe
That cries but knows not what it wants?
Is it because I am black?

Why do men sneer when I arise
And stand in their councils,
And look them eye to eye,
And speak their tongue?
Is it because I am black?

O LITTLE DAVID, PLAY ON YOUR HARP

O Little David, play on your harp,
That ivory harp with the golden strings
And sing as you did in Jewry Land,
Of the Prince of Peace and the God of Love
And the Coming Christ Immanuel.
O Little David, play on your harp.

A seething world is gone stark mad;
And is drunk with the blood,
Gorged with the flesh,
Blinded with the ashes
Of her millions of dead.
From out it all and over all
There stands, years old and fully grown,
A monster in the guise of man.
He is of war and not of war;
Born in peace,
Nutured in arrogant pride and greed,
World-creature is he and native to no land.
And war itself is merciful
When measured by his deeds.
Beneath the Crescent
Lie a people maimed;
Their only sin —
That they worship God.
On Russia's steppes

Is a race in tears;
Their one offense —
That they would be themselves.
On Flanders plains
Is a nation raped;
A bleeding gift
Of "Kultur's" conquering creed.
And in every land
Are black folk scourged;
Their only crime —
That they dare be men.

O Little David, play on your harp,
That ivory harp with the golden strings;
And psalm anew your songs of Peace,
Of the soothing calm of a Brotherly Love,
And the saving grace of a Mighty God.
O Little David, play on your harp.

SONNET TO NEGRO SOLDIERS

They shall go down unto Life's Borderland,
Walk unafraid within that Living Hell,
Nor heed the driving rain of shot and shell
That 'round them falls; but with uplifted hand,
Be one with mighty hosts, an armed band
Against man's wrong to man — for such full
well
They know. And from their trembling lips
shall swell
A song of hope the world can understand.
All this to them shall be a glorious sign,
A glimmer of that resurrection morn,
When age-long Faith, crowned with a grace benign,
Shall rise and from their brows cast down the
thorn
Of prejudice. E'en though through blood it be,
There breaks this day their dawn of Liberty.

SONNET

And Thou art One — One with th' eternal hills,
And with the flaming stars, and with the moon,
Translucent, cold. The sentinel of noon
That clothes the sky in robes of light and fills
The earth with warmth, the flowering fields, the
 rills,
The waving trees, the south wind's elfin rune,
Are One with Thee. All nature is in tune
With Thee, O Father, God — and if one wills
To humbly walk the fragrant, leaf-strewn path
And kneel in reverence 'neath the vaulted sky,
Hearing the hymnals of the waving trees
And prayers of the soughing winds — what hath
He less of heaven in him, than we, who cry,
“God in our creeds doth dwell and not in these?”

SONNET

I would not tarry if I could be gone
 Adown the path where calls my eager mind.
 That fate which knows naught but to grip and
 bind
Holds me within its grasp, a helpless pawn,
And checks my steps when I would travel on.
 Forever shall my body lag behind,
 And in this valley with the moaning wind
Must I abide with never a glimpse of dawn?

Though bends my body towards the yawning sod,
 I can endure the pain, the sorrows rife,
That hold me fast beneath their chastening rod,
 If from this turmoil and this endless strife,
Comes there a light to lead man nearer God,
 And guide his footsteps toward the Larger Life.

MEMORIES

The burnished glow of the old-gold moon
Shines brightly over me.
A thousand stars, like a thousand isles
In a dark and placid sea,
Bring memories of a golden night,
Bedecked in Autumn's hue
And fragrant with the lilac's bloom,
That brought me joy — and you.

LOVE

Love is the soothing voice of gods
 To which men ever list.
Love is the ease of soul's travail
 And sorrow's alchemist.

INCONSTANCY

Blue eyes, gray eyes,
All the eyes that be,
Hold within their changing depths
Wealth of charm to me.

Dark-eyed maid, of moment's fancy,
Gay as stars above;
Is it you that I adore,
Or is it Love I love?

AN APRIL DAY

On such a day as this I think,
 On such a day as this,
When earth and sky and nature's whole
 Are clad in April's bliss;
And balmy zephyrs gently waft
 Upon your cheek a kiss;
Sufficient is it just to live
 On such a day as this.

SUPPLICATION

I am so tired and weary,
So tired of the endless fight,
So weary of waiting the dawn
And finding endless night.

That I ask but rest and quiet —
Rest for days that are gone,
And quiet for the little space
That I must journey on.

THE GOAL

I have found joy,
 Surcease from sorrow,
From qualms for today
 And fears for tomorrow.

I have found love,
 Sifted of pain,
Of life's harsh goading
 And worldly disdain.

I have found peace,
 Still-borne from grief,
From soul's bitter mocking
 And heart's unbelief.

Now may I rest,
 Soul-glad and free,
For Lord, in the travail,
 I have found Thee.

REMEMBRANCE

Forget?

Ah, never!

Your eyes, your voice, your lips.

Those little ways of love,

Half-childish yet all-wise

That held me but a slave to you,

Will never loose their bonds.

The power to forget

Would fate but yield to me.

Remember?

Ah, too well!

The hurt, the pain, the grief.

The wrack of nightly dreams,

The ruth of brooding days,

Have left a lesion in my soul

That only Heaven can heal.

Remembrance is the lot

That fate does hold for me.

NOVEMBER

Old November, sere and brown,
Clothes the country, haunts the town,
Sheds its cloak of withered leaves,
Brings its sighing, souging breeze.
Prophet of the dying year,
Builder of its funeral bier,
Bring your message here to men;
Sound it forth that they may ken
What of Life and what of Death
Linger on your frosty breath.
Let men know to you are given
Days of thanks to God in heaven;
Thanks for things which we deem best,
Thanks, O God, for all the rest
That have taught us — (trouble, strife,
Bring thru Death a larger Life) —
Death of our base self and fear —
(Even as the dying year,
Though through cold and frost, shall bring
Forth a new and glorious spring) —
Shall shed over us the sway
Of a new and brighter day,
With Hope, Faith and Love alway.

TO FLORENCE

Sister, when at the grassy mound I stand
Which holds in cold embrace thy mortal frame,
The tears unbidden rush into my eyes
And wash away from me all save the sight
Of thy pure life and patient suffering.
And ever and anon comes memory
Of days gone by when health's bright sun did
 shine
Upon us both. And tho within the cloud
I stand, content I am to think of thee
And live as best I may, till by thy side
In God's own time, I lay me down to rest.

COMPENSATION

I plucked a rose from out a bower fair,
That overhung my garden seat;
And wondered I if, e'er before, bloomed there
A rose so sweet.

Enwrapt in beauty I scarce felt the thorn
That pricked me as I pulled the bud;
Till I beheld the rose, that summer morn,
Stained with my blood.

I sang a song that thrilled the evening air
With beauty somewhat kin to love,
And all men knew that lyric song so rare
Came from above.

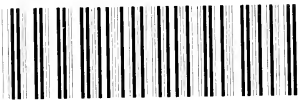
And men rejoiced to hear the golden strain;
But no man knew the price I paid,
Nor cared that out of my soul's deathless pain
The song was made.



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271 Franklin St.
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